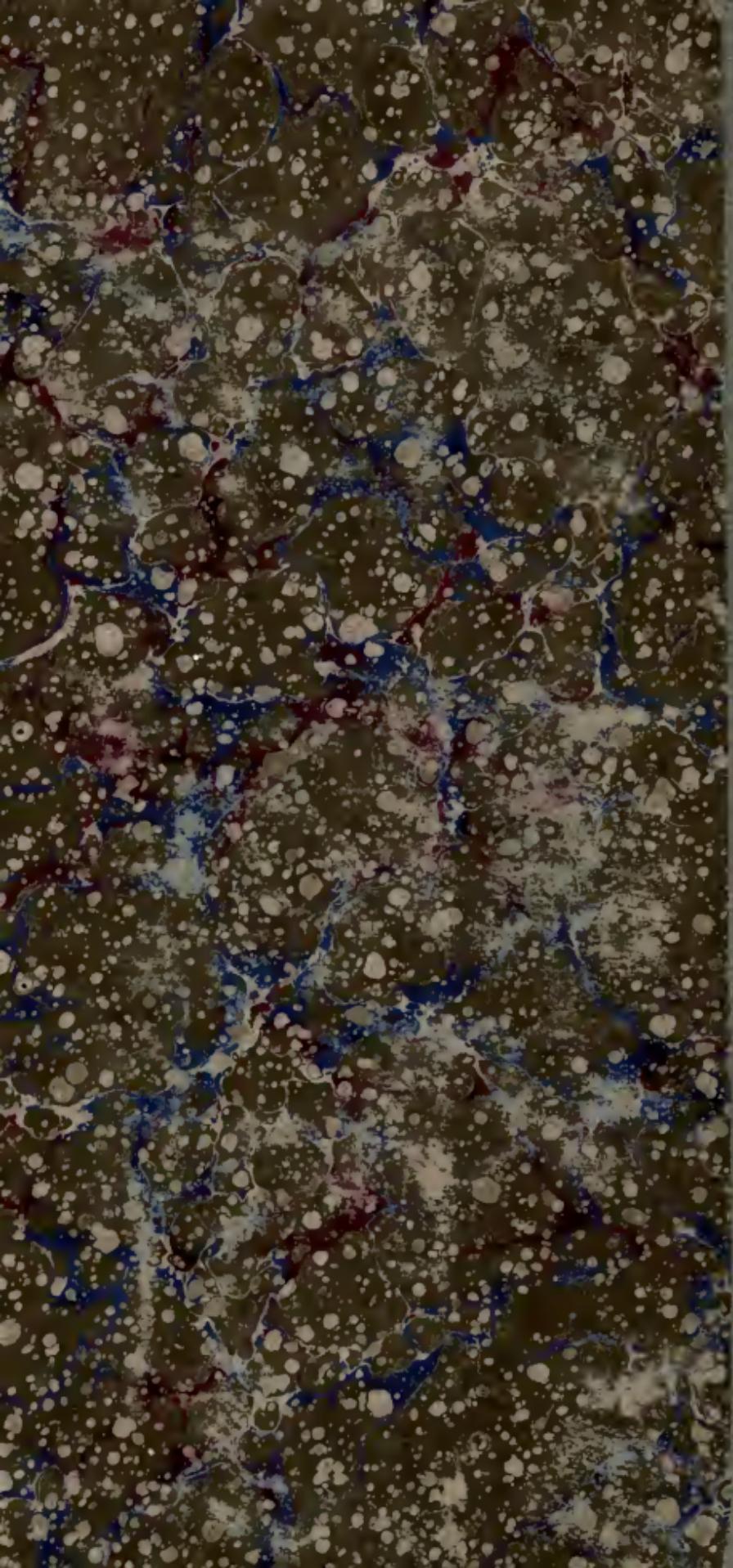
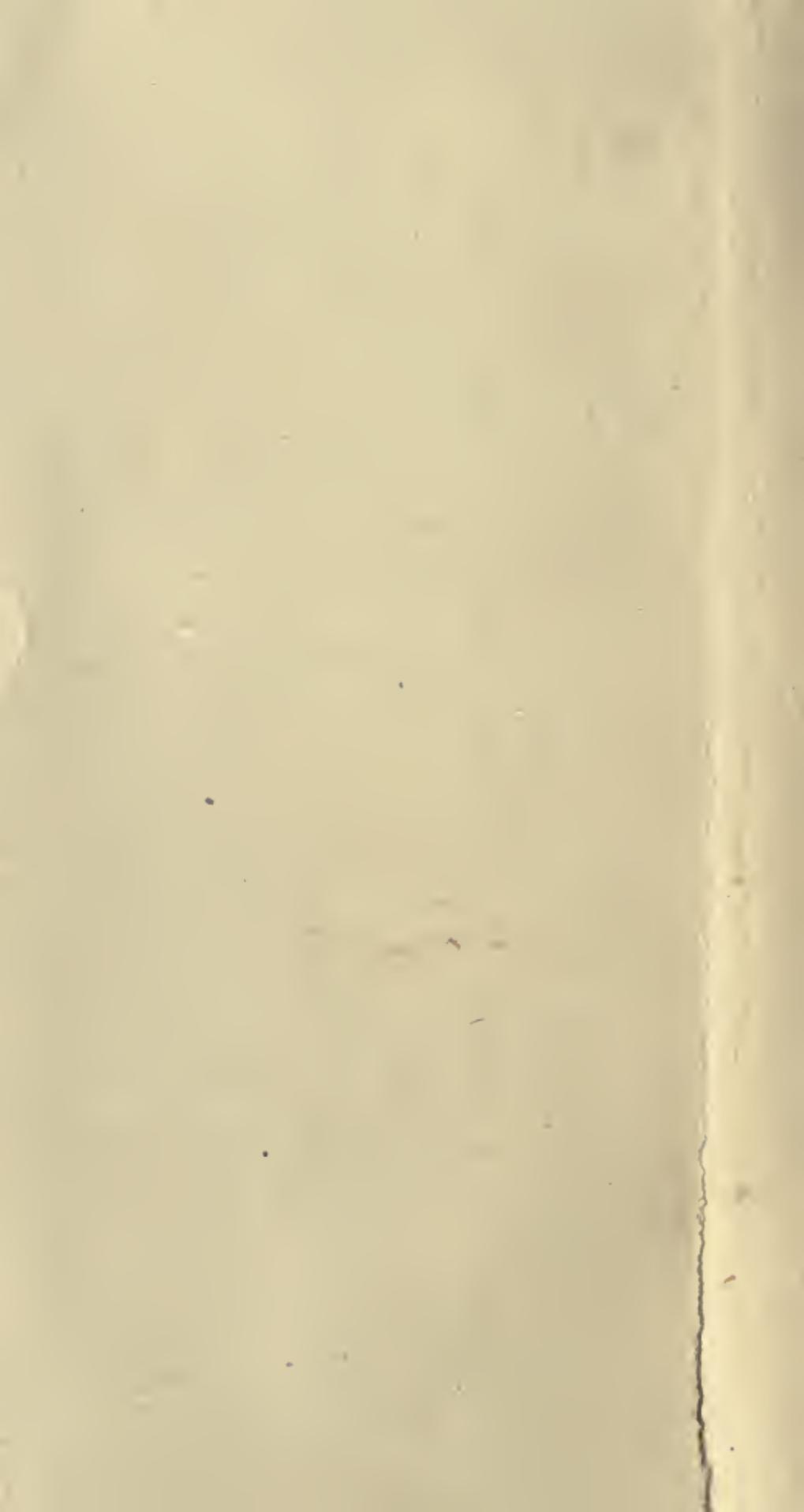


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MORALITY IN THE SCHOOLS.[†]

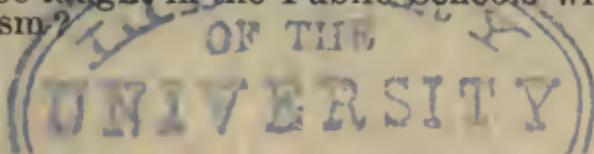
BY WILLIAM T. HARRIS, LL.D.

In offering these reflections upon the discussion of school morality, published last week in these columns, I entirely disclaim the attitude of umpireship, and even of judicial impartiality. The fact that I have already spoken as one of the parties in the debate renders such attitude inadmissible, were I otherwise sufficiently qualified. What I say, here, therefore, must pass for a review of the arguments advanced in favor of sectarian or denominational teaching in the public schools of dogmatic religion as a means of moral instruction.

1. I call attention, first, to an important discrimination between instruction in the theory of morals and an inculcation of moral habits. Strictly speaking, the study of moral philosophy is not a moral, but an

* Copies of this tract may be obtained at \$1.00 per hundred of the publishers, Christian Register Association, 141 Franklin Street, Boston.

† Written as a review of the discussion in the *Christian Register* of Jan. 31, 1889, on the question, Can Morality be taught in the Public Schools without Sectarianism?



intellectual discipline. To study the physiology of digestion does not satisfy the appetite for food. One may know the theory of morality, but he is not moral unless he acquires and practises moral habits. Moral education relates strictly to the will, and is a training in habits of action. The theory of morals is an important aid, but not morality itself. Morality is behavior, but it is conceded that so to teach the moral view of the world that the pupil adopts it as a mode of thinking is conducive to the formation of moral habits.

Those who hold the affirmative in this discussion usually, but not always, see this point clearly, and call attention to the efficiency of the school in securing the actual growth of moral habits in the community.

2. Another important discrimination relates to the definition of the province of the school as compared with other educational instrumentalities; namely, the family, the Church, the State and civil society. It is tacitly assumed by some of the advocates of religious instruction in the public schools that the school is the only educative institution. Their argument, admitting this, is very strong: "Omit religion from the school, and you omit it altogether from life, because the school furnishes the only education that the child receives." The education of the family is thus ignored: so is that of the

Church, as well as that of the public opinion of the community, and all other influences. But define the province of the school as instruction in the conventionalities of good behavior, the mastery of the means of intercommunication, and instruction in the current intellectual view of the world, and at once it is evident that essential phases of education are left for the other institutions. The school should at least not undo the work of other educational institutions, if it does not re-enforce them. It cannot, however, take the place of the family or the State or the Church, and do their work for them, no matter how important that work is, nor how sadly it is neglected by them. The responsibility must be placed where it belongs. If there is irreligion, practical atheism in the community, the Church is evidently not as efficient as it ought to be, and the family is also derelict. If the school secures good behavior and a knowledge of letters and science, it has contributed its share. The Church can then confine its labors to the work of teaching its holy doctrines instead of wasting much energy in doing the secular work of teaching reading, arithmetic, and geography, as a foundation of its religious instruction. It finds the public school pupil prepared for its more advanced instructions, the elementary, mechanical, and secular work being accomplished.

3. There is a fallacy in the reasoning which says: "The Bible is the foundation of our civilization, therefore it ought to be studied in our schools. Religion is the basis of morality; hence, where religion is not expressly taught, there can be no education in morality." The Christian idea doubtless underlies our civilization; but it also underlies our science, our jurisprudence, our politics, and all our secular institutions. Without the idea of Nature as a revelation of a God of grace (or, as Plato expressed it, "a God who possesses no envy"), mankind would not have come to the thought of inventorying physical facts. It is certainly an historic truth that natural science began with this idea. But it does not follow that religious ceremonial should be carried into science; there must be specialization, in order that the whole may be complete. Scientific men ought to be religious men. They should belong to the church,—at least to the invisible church of spiritual believers. But, if they were to carry religious ceremonial into science, they would destroy science, while they would desecrate religion. So in civil society, with its trades and occupations, religious ceremonial does not help there, but hinders. The Turk is not any more honest as a merchant for selling his figs in the name of Allah. We all suspect a business man who makes a display of relig-

ion in his shop. So, too, the school has a special function which is hindered by the addition of the function of the Church. This we may see by considering the next important discrimination.

4. The failure to discriminate religion from morality is the chief source of difficulty in harmonizing the conflicting views offered in this discussion. Let it be conceded that religion is the ultimate ground of morality. This means that the idea which man forms of the First Principle determines all his ideas of the origin and destiny of man and nature. These ideas, again, determine ultimately his conduct of life. The Hindu or Buddhist idea of the Absolute as empty being devoid of personality must produce a radically different civilization from the Mohammedan idea of a personal God. The ethical codes must differ. The ethical code of Christianity differs from all others for the reason that it lays more stress on the condescending grace of God than they do. Nevertheless, morality is not religion for all that. Religion involves acts of devotion and sacrifice of a ceremonial character. Morality involves behavior toward others and toward one's self and a ceremonial entirely different from that of religion; namely, the conventional ceremonial which we call the code of politeness, manners, and behavior toward others.

The whole of this behavior can be taught, and is taught best, without bringing it into the same place and time with religious instruction. Moral behavior relates to details which appear unessential when placed side by side with the doctrine of man's relation to God. The strictly moral duties concern the relation of man to man, and for this reason are all finite when compared with the subject-matter of religion. The religious duty of the salvation of the soul is so all-engrossing that it obscures the relations of man to society. The direct mediation of man with God tends to displace the finite mediation of man with his fellow-men. In the first days of Christianity, its converts fled to the wilderness, in order to live the holy life of hermits and realize a more direct communion with God, apart from the distractions incident to civil life. In fact, the beggar, who is the symbol of the utter annulment of the secular world, was considered the nearest approach to the divine life. Calderon represents him thus in his "World Theatre." Productive industry and beggary are antitheses.

5. Justice is properly called the leading virtue of the secular order. On it is founded the political State. Each man shall have his deed returned to him. A deed that injures society is defined as a crime, and punished. It is essential that its extent

of injury shall be measured, in order that it may be punished. As nearly as possible, the State proceeds to return upon the criminal the symbolical equivalent of his deed,—death for murder, deprivation of property for wanton trespass, deprivation of liberty for fraud which attacks the bond of society. Now, if the Church and State are not separated, this administration of justice cannot be secured. Religion regards, and must regard, derelictions as sins. Sin is its category, while crime is the category of the State. Here is an immense difference. A crime can be measured and punished. But the Church must not admit that a sin can be measured. It is infinite, and no finite punishment can wash it away. Only repentance can free one from its effects. Repentance without punishment will do this just as well as repentance with punishment. Now, let the religious distinction be confounded with the legal one, and the State will be destroyed. If crime is to be punished as sin, then all crimes must be punished with death,—the code of Draco. Even death would not atone for sin. Again, justice considers only the overt act. It attempts to return his deed on the criminal,—not his unexecuted intention, his disposition, but only his deed. But religion regards, and must regard, the disposition and intention. If it finds the sinner repentant,

the Church may offer him the consolations of religion, and assure him of reconciliation with God and of escape from divine wrath. But the State cannot forgive the murderer for the reason that he has repented.

The exercise of civil power on the part of the Church tends perpetually to the introduction of finite standards, thus allowing expiation for sin, permitting the substitution of penance for repentance. The exercise of ecclesiastical power by the State, on the other hand, tends to confuse its standards of punishment, and to make its penalties too severe at one time and too lax at another, and thus to render the whole course of justice uncertain by considering the disposition of the criminal rather than his overt act. In fact, Protestants claim that their secession from the Mother Church was occasioned by this confusion of standards. Though the religious persecutions, of which so much has been made, were certainly not made by the Church, but by the State assuming ecclesiastical functions, yet the Church has had to bear the obloquy. The results of such confusion of the legal consciousness with the religious consciousness—making a crime also a sin—is so disastrous that it has become with us the great principle to separate Church and State; and this principle is visibly gaining ground all over the world.

6. The separation of Church and State involves the separation of the Church and the public school. A candid consideration of the proper methods of religious instruction will also make clear the fact that such methods are incompatible with the best methods of school instruction. The secular branches—reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and history—form the conventional instrumentality by the mastery of which the pupil is enabled to lay hold of and participate in the treasures of human experience in the form of literature and science. These branches of study are “godless” only in the sense that they relate to man and nature directly, and to the divine only indirectly. But they help the individual to participation with mankind, and enable him to share in the victory achieved by the race over nature. This is a reflection of the religious principle, although it is not religion itself. Hence, we find their relation to religious instruction quite similar to that of the State to the Church. But, when taught side by side with religion, they tend to weaken the effect of the latter, and, in turn, they suffer from the tendency to adopt the religious method of instruction.

In these secular branches, the mind is to be trained to keep all its powers awake. Thought is to be alert and critical; faith is to be dormant. In religion, faith in author-

ity is to be the chief organ, and the critical faculty of the intellect is to be kept subordinate. Religious truth is revealed in allegoric and symbolic form, and is to be appreciated, not merely by the intellect, but by the fantasy. The analytic understanding is necessarily hostile and sceptical in its attitude toward religious truth, but it is an essential activity in the apprehension of science. The conclusion is obvious that the mind must not be changed too abruptly from secular studies to religious contemplation. To bring in a lesson on religious dogmas just succeeding a lesson in mathematics or physical science, inevitably has the disadvantage that the mind brings with it the bent or proclivity of the latter study, and to the serious injury of the former. We are not surprised to find, therefore, as a practical fact, that such mingling of religious and secular instruction cultivates habits of flippant and shallow reasoning on sacred themes, thus sapping the foundations of piety, or that, on the other hand, the influence of the dogmatic tone of the religious lessons creeps into the secular recitations and drives out critical acuteness and independent thinking from the mind of the pupil. Too much authority leaves too little room for original thinking. But, in religious lessons wherein the divine is taught as revealed to the human race, it is right that

the raw, immature intellect of the youth, is not permitted to attempt to drag the sacred themes before the bar of its critical judgment. The child is not able to grasp the rationality of the dogma, for this requires the deepest speculative and practical culture. Hence, the utmost care should be taken to surround religious instruction with the proper atmosphere. The subject should be approached through solemn preparatory exercises such as the Church has established in its ceremonial. The time and place should be made to assist instead of distract the religious impression. With regard to the example of Germany, Austria, and other States, that place religious lessons on the regular school programme so many hours in a week, I boldly appeal to the experience of all who have inspected the results of such teaching, and inquire whether they do not confirm the theoretical conclusions here deduced. Do not the pupils well taught in secular studies learn to hold in contempt the contents of religious lessons? Do they not bring their critical intellects to bear on the dogmas and become sceptical of all religious truth? Is not the Germany of to-day the most sceptical of all peoples? Is not its educated class famous for its "free thinking," so called? Then there is France, where the Church had its own way with religious instruction until recently. Is there

another class of people in the world so abounding in atheism as the French educated class? In other countries where religion is taught in the schools, does not the authoritative and dogmatic method of religion do much to render inefficient the instruction in the secular studies? Is not this apt to be the case in parochial schools?

7. The classification of pupils in accordance with their religious belief has a positively immoral effect. Great stress is laid on the religious differences in the religious instruction given in separate schools in order to justify such separation, and to guard the youth against the contamination of other bodies of believers.

The spirit of the school adds intensity to the impression received from the instructor in doctrines. In the nature of theological truth, there lies the possibility of fanaticism and bigotry. "I am one of the sheep, and my neighbor who attends the other school is one of the goats. If God hates my neighbor, it is wrong for me to love him. Toleration is a crime. If by bodily suffering his soul may be saved, the power is merciful that inflicts it." The highest virtue is divine charity, and religious exclusion threatens it.

In these days of the newspaper and cheap transit from one place to another, and, above all, in these days of the common school, the

barriers of religious caste are broken down, and a universal spirit of toleration has come to exist. Children of all confessions mingling in the school learn to know, respect, and love one another. This is the highest result of moral education.

8. As to the plan of settling this question, one may remark that the complete secularization of the school is the truly feasible one. This is proved by the very general adoption of the public school by Catholic parents. Where the greatest pains are taken to avoid proselyting such children by Protestant influence, the Catholic is most ready to patronize it. The Catholic hierarchy will recognize the purely secular public school soon after it recognizes the principle of the separation of Church and State,—a principle now pretty generally recognized by the Catholic laity.

The public school should be careful to exclude not only the sectarian religious instruction of Protestantism, but also the sectarian interpretation of history, and in general make the public school a place where the Catholic may feel safe to leave his children. In St. Louis, the superintendent gave (and gives) permits to all children whose parents requested it, allowing them to be absent two hours in each week for religious instruction under the supervision of priest or pastor. This is one de-

vice which does not conflict with the principle of the separation of Church and State, and yet treats conscientious scruples with respect. The other plan of permitting the pastor to enter the school and teach religion conflicts with the constitutional provisions of the majority of the States of the Union. It is not a settlement possible with our present temper or with the conviction toward which we see all nations approaching. The spirit of our civilization is to separate the Church from secular institutions wider and wider. But such separation does not make them godless nor the Church less powerful, but quite the contrary.

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SAMUEL J. BARROWS,
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GEO. H. ELLIS,
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